



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION 8**

1595 Wynkoop Street
DENVER, CO 80202-1129
Phone 800-227-8917
<http://www.epa.gov/region08>

JAN 25 2010

Ref: 8EPR-N

Scott Fitzwilliams, Forest Supervisor
White River National Forest Supervisor Office
P.O. Box 948
Glenwood Springs, CO 81602-0948

Re: 2007 Vail Ski Area Improvements Project
Final EIS: CEQ #20090440

Dear Mr. Fitzwilliams:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 8 reviewed the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), the Record of Decision (ROD), and the Response to Comments (RTC) for the 2007 Vail Ski Area Improvements Project in the White River National Forest (WRNF) in accordance with EPA's responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 42 U.S.C. Section 4332(2)(C), and Section 309 of the Clean Air Act, 42 U.S.C. Section 7609. As presented in the FEIS and ROD, the United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS), proposes to:

- upgrade Chair #5 to a detachable high-speed quad;
- install a high-speed quad chairlift in Sun Down Bowl;
- expand the training and racing terrain on Golden Peak;
- provide maintained access to West Earl's Bowl;
- perform snowmaking on the Intermediate trails serviced by Chairs 19 and 26; and
- construct and operate a new maintenance facility and restaurant (located at mid Vail) entirely within Vail's special Use Permit (SUP) boundary.

EPA previously provided comments for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) project on February 11, 2009. EPA acknowledges that in the ROD the decision has been made to select Alternative 2 – the Proposed Action with modifications. EPA commends the Forest Service's decision to modify the selected alternative so that it does not include the Golden Peak development. EPA is pleased to see that the Proposed Action was modified in response to concerns raised during the DEIS comment period.

EPA is pleased to see that the cumulative effect analysis in Section 3A of the FEIS has been updated to reflect our concerns from the DEIS. EPA also understands that based upon analyses conducted in conjunction with the DEIS, the proposed snowmaking was scaled back (i.e., limited to Simba) to address soil and watershed concerns (pg 5 ROD).

Regarding comment #31 in the RTC, EPA had expressed concern about moving the maintenance facilities from private lands to public forest lands. In an e-mail correspondence dated January 14, 2010, between EPA and Roger Poirier, Winter Sports Program Manager for WRNF, Mr. Poirier explained that:

"This project does not include moving actual facilities from Vail's base area to NFS lands on the mountain. While some operations and activities that now occur at those base facilities may also be performed on the mountain, the idea was to have a new centrally-located maintenance facility built on mountain (like most ski areas have) that allows for more efficient maintenance operations and less snowcat traffic (potentially safer slopes). Given Vail's size, it would be very difficult to groom runs, test chairs, etc. if maintenance/operation activities were limited to the base of the front side."

EPA appreciates this additional information and clarification.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the FEIS and ROD. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our comments, please contact Sarah Hester of my staff at (303) 312-6008, or you may contact me at (303) 312-6004.

Sincerely,



Larry Svoboda
Director, NEPA Compliance and Review Program
Office of Ecosystems Protection and Remediation